

1963 Birmingham Children's March: A Frontier in the Civil Rights Movement

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Individual Documentary

Process Paper - 499 words

I knew I wanted to study some aspect of African-American history with my project. The recent bans on African-American history happening in various states around the country have made me only want to dig deeper. What is it about African-American history that folks are so afraid of kids learning? I remember my mom teaching me about the Children's March when I was around 4, and I remember her taking me to the L.B.J Library in Austin, Texas. I knew it was part of the Civil Rights Movement, and I knew it was a fascinating example to me of people that were my age and who looked like me, leading and bringing about changes for their community and eventually the whole nation. Then, when I came across a picture of my four year old self standing in front of an exhibit of President LB Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that sparked an interest in me to learn more about the Children's March of 1963, and how it might represent a frontier.

When I started my research, I was trying to get a sense of what happened during the Children's March and the chronological order of the events by reading mostly secondary and some primary resources about the Children's March, while taking notes from each resource. I found books, articles, and even video clips with quotes from people who'd participated in the Children's March when they were kids. I had mixed feelings about learning that this year is the 60th anniversary of the 1963 Children's March. On the one hand, it meant that I was able to find plenty of research. On the other hand, it was really hard to read about the ways these little kids were treated by adults and leaders in their city that they should have made them feel safe. I was so upset at one point that I had to stop working on my project for a little while. Some of what I read really disgusted me. I was disgusted about the brutal and inhumane things done to

children. I also thought it was terrible that this happened only 60 years ago, when my grandparents would have been kids that age. How could a person have done something that horrible to my grandparents?

I ended up deciding on using a documentary to present my research because I was inspired by a documentary one of my older brothers made in middle school. When I forged on in my research, I began to see some of the many ways that the Children's March represented frontiers - the Birmingham location was the most racist and one of the most violent during segregation, the children were some of the youngest activists, the numbers of kid activists was so great, and more. I ultimately found that the Children's March of 1963 was a frontier in the civil rights movement, a catalyst for the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and it reinvigorated the civil rights movement overall.

# Annotated Bibliography

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Image of Black kid activists being led to jail by the police on May 4, 1963.

Article describes some reflections of a participant in the March.

### **Secondary Sources**

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[www.birminghamtimes.com/2023/01/rev-bernice-king-announced-as-keynote-speaker-for-global-forum-in-birmingham/](http://www.birminghamtimes.com/2023/01/rev-bernice-king-announced-as-keynote-speaker-for-global-forum-in-birmingham/). Accessed 30 Jan. 2023.

This article provided some background information and a summary of the Children's March and its impact.

Brown-Nagin, Tomiko. "Tomiko Brown-Nagin's Book Traces Tactics of Groundbreaking Lawyer Constance Baker Motley amid Pivotal Protests." Edited by Tomiko Brown-Nagin and Daniel P.S. Paul. *The Harvard Gazette*, Harvard Public Affairs and Communications, 13 Jan. 2022, news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2022/01/rescuing-the-civil-rights-movement-and-children-of-birmingham/. Accessed 26 Feb. 2023.

This article helped my understanding of how the Children's March helped the civil rights movement regain momentum. There were also helpful details about individuals who played critical roles.

Lemon, Matt. *Martin Luther King, Jr.* 3 June 2008. *Flickr*, www.flickr.com/photos/mplemmon/2612143224. Accessed 11 Mar. 2023.

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Levinson, Cynthia. *We've Got a Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March*. Atlanta, Peachtree, 2015.

This book was one of my first introductions to the Children's March. It gave me detailed background information about Birmingham, segregation, and it gave me detailed information and context for the Birmingham Campaign, its adult leaders, and specific kid activists. This resource also helped to lead me to additional resources.

*National Park Service Brochure. National Park Service: Birmingham Civil Rights*, National Park Service, 2 Nov. 2022, npshistory.com/publications/bicr/index.htm#:~:text=From%201945%20to%201962%2C%20Birmingham,city%20the%20nickname%20%22Bombingham%22.&text=By%20196

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I drew from this resource more details about how violent Birmingham was - even amongst the segregated south and information about some of the historic locations and leaders of this time period.

Zullo, Allan. *Young Civil Rights Heroes*. New York City, Scholastic, 2015.

This resource helped me to understand the Children's March and some of the stories of the kids who participated in an easy to understand story format.